

WE CLAIM:

Sub. B1> 1. A system for packaging multiple containers, the system comprising the steps of:

moving a carrier through an applicating machine, the carrier constructed of flexible plastic having a plurality of elongated apertures aligned in transverse ranks, which elongated apertures are oriented in a longitudinal direction of the carrier and have a longitudinal pitch between a center of each adjacent elongated aperture, the longitudinal pitch having a first length;

moving a plurality of containers through the applicating machine, each container of the plurality of containers having a maximum diameter having a second length shorter than the first length spaced apart from an adjacent container by the applicating machine at the first length; and

positioning the carrier over the plurality of containers whereby each elongated aperture engages with one of the containers to form a package having a container pitch between a center of adjacent containers approximately equal to the second length.

2. The system of Claim 1 wherein the elongated apertures, in an unstressed condition prior to application to the plurality of containers, are approximately four to six times longer than wide.

3. The system of Claim 1 wherein the carrier further comprises a plurality of relief holes positioned between adjacent longitudinal rows of elongated apertures.

4. The system of Claim 3 wherein longitudinal extremities of the relief holes overlap end portions of adjacent elongated apertures in the longitudinal direction.

5. The system of Claim 1 wherein the first length is approximately 3.0".

6. The system of Claim 5 wherein the second length is approximately 2.6".

7. The system of Claim 1 wherein the first length is approximately 1.15 times greater than the second length.

8. The system of Claim 1 wherein an overall length of the carrier is reduced after the carrier is positioned over the plurality of containers to form a package.

9. An applicating system for packaging multiple containers in a carrier, each container having a height and a maximum diameter, the applicating system comprising: an applicating machine accommodating a plurality of containers spaced at

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intervals by the applying machine and the carrier having adjacent longitudinal rows of elongated apertures with a longitudinal pitch between each elongated aperture having a first length that is greater than the maximum diameter and, after application to the plurality of containers juxtaposed relative to one another, the container pitch between adjacent containers within the carrier is a second length, less than the first length and approximately equal to the maximum diameter.

10. The applying system of Claim 9 wherein the carrier further comprises a plurality of relief holes positioned between adjacent longitudinal rows of elongated apertures.

11. The system of Claim 9 wherein the first length is approximately 3.0".

12. The system of Claim 9 wherein the second length is approximately 2.6".

13. The system of Claim 9 wherein the first length is approximately 1.15 times greater than the second length.

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AT 14. A carrier for unitizing a plurality of containers, the carrier having an unstressed condition prior to application to the plurality of containers and a stressed

condition subsequent to application to the plurality of adjacent containers, each container of the plurality of adjacent containers having a maximum diameter, the carrier comprising:

a sheet of flexible plastic having a plurality of elongated apertures aligned in longitudinal rows and transverse ranks, which elongated apertures are oriented in a longitudinal direction of the carrier and in the unstressed condition have a longitudinal pitch between each adjacent elongated aperture, the longitudinal pitch having a first length greater than a distance between adjacent containers of the plurality of adjacent containers;

a plurality of relief holes positioned in the sheet, the relief holes positioned between adjacent longitudinal rows of elongated apertures; and

a container pitch between each adjacent elongated aperture when the carrier is in the stressed condition after application to the containers, the container pitch having a second length approximately equal to the maximum diameter and shorter than the first length.

15. The system of Claim 14 wherein the elongated apertures are approximately four to six times longer than wide.

16. The system of Claim 14 wherein longitudinal extremities of the relief holes overlap end portions of adjacent elongated apertures in the longitudinal direction.

17. The carrier of Claim 14 wherein the constant longitudinal pitch is maintained for a plurality of containers having a diameter within an approximate 1" range of diameters.

18. The carrier of Claim 14 wherein the plurality of containers each have a diameter within an approximate .200" range of diameters.